

Message Text

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14

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FM AMEMBASSY KIGALI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4395

C O N F I D E N T I A L KIGALI 0922

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINR, RW

SUBJECT: ALLEGED DEATH THREAT AGAINST NATIONAL BANK GOVERNOR

1. I WISH TO PLACE ON RECORD, WITH HOPE IT WILL BE CLOSELY HELD, FACT THAT EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED COPY OF A LETTER ADDRESSED TO PRESIDENT HABYARIMANA BY NATIONAL BANK GOVERNOR (AND MRND CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBER) JEAN BIRARA, IN WHICH BIRARA ALLEGES PRESIDENT'S SECURITY CHIEF HAS THREATENED TO "LIQUIDATE" HIM A LA PATRICE LUMUMBA. THE COPY ARRIVED AT THE EMBASSY NOV. 30 IN A NATIONAL BANK ENVELOPE, ADDRESSED TO ME PERSONALLY IN THE GOVERNOR'S HANDWRITING.

2. BIRARA'S LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT, DATED 29 NOVEMBER, PROTESTS THAT HE HAS SERVED HIS COUNTRY "LOYALLY AND CONSCIENTIOUSLY." IF GOVERNMENT BELIEVES OTHERWISE, IT HAS THE OPTION AND DUTY TO DISMISS HIM. IN THE MEANTIME, BIRARA WRITES, HE PLANS NOT TO ACCEPT ANY INVITATION TO OFFICIAL CEREMONIES OF EITHER THE GOVERNMENT OR THE MRND, ADDING "AND I HAVE NO OTHER MEANS OF DEFENDING MYSELF BUT SO SPEAK (ABOUT THE THREAT) TO MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY."

3. COMMENT: BIRARA'S LETTER MAKES CLEAR HE BELIEVES THAT THE SECURITY CHIEF'S ALLEGED THREAT WAS MADE ON BEHALF OF THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF. IF THAT IS TRUE, IT REPRESENTS A DRAMATIC FALLING OUT BETWEEN TWO FORMER COMRADES-IN-ARMS,
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THE ONE NOW RWANDA'S PRESIDENT AND THE OTHER ITS MOST

ACCOMPLISHED ECONOMIST. BIRARA'S BRIEF LETTER MAKES REFERENCE TO THOSE EARLIER DAYS, NOTING HE WAS PREVIOUSLY THREATENED WITH "LIQUIDATION" AT THE END OF 1972. IN FACT, THEN-PRESIDENT KAYIBANDA APPARENTLY PLOTTED TO DO AWAY WITH BOTH BIRARA AND HABYARIMANA HIMSELF AT THAT TIME, AND THE TWIN THREAT FACING THE TWO LED THEM EVENTUALLY TO ORGANIZE THE COUP WHICH OVERTHREW KAYIBANDA.

4. IF A FALLING OUT HAS OCCURRED, WE ASSUME IT GROWS OUT OF BIRARA'S DECISION (WITHOUT PREVIOUSLY CONSULTING THE PRESIDENT) TO LEAVE THE NATIONAL BANK IN ORDER TO ACCEPT AN EXECUTIVE POSITION WITH INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND. WE HAVE HEARD THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS OUTRAGED WITH BIRARA'S DECISION, WHICH BECAME KNOWN LAST SUMMER, AND FELT HE WAS ABANDONING HIS DUTIES TOWARD RWANDA. WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE, HOWEVER, THAT PRESIDENT'S ANGER WOULD LEAD HIM TO THREATEN BIRARA'S LIFE.

5. UNFORTUNATELY, USG IS NOT AN ENTIRELY DISINTERESTED OBSERVER. NOT ONLY IS BIRARA ONE OF THE FEW TRULY BRILLIANT PEOPLE IN THE GOR (IF NOT THE ONLY ONE), HE HAS ALSO BECOME ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THE ONLY CURRENT AMCIT INVESTMENT PROJECT HERE--ONE WHICH ALSO INVOLVES SUBSTANTIAL COMMITMENTS FROM OPIC AND IFC. OF LATE, HIS ROLE HAS BEEN A NEGATIVE AND RATHER UNFRIENDLY ONE. INDEED, MY OWN RELATIONS WITH HIM HAVE NOT YET GOTTEN OFF THE GROUND DUE TO HIS COOLNESS TOWARD ME. IN THIS CONTEXT, IT WAS NOT HELPFUL THAT BIRARA COMPARED THE ALLEGED THREAT AGAINST HIM TO THE ASSASSINATION OF LUMUMBA, WHICH MANY AFRICANS ATTRIBUTE TO THE HAND OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT.

6. IT IS A MEASURE OF BIRARA'S DESPERATION THAT HE HAS DISTRIBUTED COPIES OF HIS LETTER BEYOND THE CONFINES OF RWANDAN INTERNAL POLITICS. I DO NOT KNOW WHO ELSE HAS RECEIVED A COPY AND DO NOT INTEND TO ASK. I DO, HOWEVER, INTEND TO PURSUE MY REQUEST FOR APPOINTMENT TO MAKE A COURTESY CALL ON NATIONAL BANK GOVERNOR.
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